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# THE MUSICAL TIMES, And Singing Class Circular.

MARCH 1st, 1859.

## VOICE AND VOCAL ART;\*

*A Treatise written for the use of Teachers and Students  
of Singing,*

By SABILLA NOVELLO.

(Continued from page 392, Vol. 8.)

### ON THE MANAGEMENT OF BREATH.

RESPIRATION consists of two actions—inhalation and expiration. In the usual process of breathing, inhalation and expiration are of nearly equal duration; but during the exercise of singing, inhalation, which prepares sound, should be quickly and fully made,—while expiration, which forms sound, should be as much retarded as possible.

The lungs of a person of ordinary size, and in good health, contain on an average about twelve pints of air; when breathing is perfectly easy, about one pint is inhaled at each inspiration, but this quantity may be increased to as much as seven pints, according to the power of inspiration before any great muscular effort, or in preparing for vocalisation. After the most thorough expiration, however, the lungs still retain some quantity of air, and never remain entirely empty.

Although vigorous respiration must partly depend on the natural formation of the chest, yet the quantity of air admitted into the lungs is generally nearly equal in most persons, and a lengthened emission is to be gained by skilful management.

One of the first requisites in the art of singing, is great command over respiration; for as tone is formed by the current of air emitted by the lungs, it naturally follows that complete controul over this propellant power is of the greatest importance. In preparing respiration for vocalising purposes, the chest and the muscles below it should be kept permanently expanded; fresh supplies of air will thus be more readily admitted, and subsequently remain longer in the vacuum produced, than if the walls of the chest are suffered to collapse.

Tone should proceed without impediment straight through its natural passages, and should be a continuous stream of air, heightened and lowered by contraction of the vocal ligaments,—not a succession of disunited, jerked-out sounds. This stream or column of tone is capable of receiving four distinct impulsions—from the chest, throat, tongue, or lips; to prove this, the pupil may sing a sustained note, and, during its emission, pronounce the following syllables: *ha, ka, ta, or pa.*

During vocalisation, inhalation may be made in two manners—by full breath, and by half breath.

Full breath consists of a complete inhalation, taken before the commencement of singing, or after an apparently entire expiration; half breath consists of an additional supply of air, taken by a partial inspiration during the course of singing, so as to refresh the lungs and tonal strength.

By long practice, breath may be *smuggled* in, unobserved by auditors. This is accomplished by holding the muscles round the waist widely extended, and the nostrils also expanded,—a very slight effort, or rather, an instant's cessation of expiration, will admit a portion of air sufficient to end a musical phrase, or to prolong a cadence.

Inhalation should be made fully and quickly, but without any sobbing noise or over-hurry.

Emission should be made as tardily as possible; and the student will do well to consider breath more as a propellant power which sends forth sound *by remaining behind it*, than as the sound itself.

In order to gain mastery over respiration, the practice of long-sustained notes is advisable. These should be commenced extremely piano,—swelled out to the full extent of the singer's power,—and then diminished to piano; or they may be commenced at full voice, and diminished very gradually.

These exercises will enable the student to ascertain and expend the exact quantity of breath required for the comparative loudness of tone on each note, and will strengthen the expanding and collapsing muscles used in retaining breath.

It is not proposed to introduce many written musical exercises in the present work, as these are contained in my "Vocal School," to which I shall occasionally refer for practical illustrations.

The following are the most essential practical rules for taking breath during vocalisation:—

In taking full breath before a musical phrase, the time necessary for inhalation should be subtracted from the preceding note. In taking a half breath in the middle of a sentence, the time of inhalation should be taken from the note which follows respiration, unless the musical phrase require this note to retain its full value of duration.

Breath must never be taken in the middle of a word, and, if possible, not until a poetical or musical phrase be terminated.

Full breath should be taken at the commencement of all passages; and a half breath (when necessary), to complete a passage, or whenever a melody is interrupted by rests. When breath is requisite in the middle of a passage, it should be taken before a word of small importance, such as *the, of, to, and, &c.*, because respiration shortens the note succeeding it, and therefore should not occur before words of much significance.

Breath should never be taken so as to divide an article from its substantive, nor this latter from its adjective; neither may it be taken between a dissonant note and its resolution on the succeeding tone.

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Every proper opportunity of taking breath should be seized, so as to keep the lungs constantly replenished with fresh air, and save the chest superfluous fatigue.

All uncalled-for effort is injudicious, and may be injurious; the perfection of art is not the mere accomplishment of difficulties, but their easy attainment by simple and legitimate means.

#### ON CORRECT INTONATION.

This absolute requisite of all singers should be made a primary study during early practice. Any fault of intonation causes actual suffering to an intelligent listener, and should never, on any account, be suffered to pass uncorrected. Great attention is necessary to detect whether faulty intonation arise from radical organic defect, or from temporary physical inability. In the former case, the evil is generally incurable, and therefore I would advise the immediate relinquishment of all attempts at vocalisation; for however beautiful in quality a voice may be, its performance can never give pleasure if it be false in intonation;—in fact, the more powerful and metallic a vocal instrument, the more distressing its out-of-tune sounds will prove.

Much injury to correct intonation is caused by the differing pitch of pianofortes, with which students practise. A voice should possess an ascertained and unalterable pitch, as much as a violin or clarinet; and the mind or musical ear should be accustomed to rely with as much certainty on intervals executed by the voice as by any other instrument.\*

When faulty intonation is perceptible to the student, and arises from incapability, or indolence of the glottis, the teacher must at once devote all care to conquer this defect, and prevent its becoming habitual. Intervals, commencing with the more natural ones belonging to the common chord, should be exercised, and, after sufficient practice, sung without accompaniment, so that the student may become intimately acquainted with their exact relative distance, and accustom the throat to faithful execution. Sevenths, ninths, and other intervals, may be practised in the same manner, until perfect surety is gained.

Recitative, or musical dialogue, may succeed as study, so as to train the voice to perform with accuracy, intervals united to text;† but it will

be advisable to sing these, or any other vocal pieces, *at first* without words, which can be added when all the musical distances have been well impressed on the ear, and mechanical action of the throat. This latter should retain the attitude assumed during the production of *vocalised* sound, and the words must be formed by the motion of the mouth and lips alone. Singers who are uncertain in their intonation, however, should sing but little at sight, and learn by heart all songs or pieces which they intend to perform before listeners, as any hesitation about words or intervals may cause the voice to waver in its true pitch.

It is a remarkable fact that some voices are more liable to get out of tune in flat keys, while others are equally inclined to be incorrect in sharp keys; from this it would appear that certain keys are analogous or sympathetic to certain voices. Experience proves that the same piece will produce different effects in different keys, each of which possesses, as does every human voice, distinctive characteristics.

The most common defect is an inclination to sing sharp on the fourth of every major scale; this may be accounted for by its being only a *semitone* from the third, so that the throat, after having formed *whole* tones, finds some difficulty in reducing its action so as to produce a semitone. Students should analytically examine the construction of scales and their component intervals, so as to find none but mechanical difficulties to overcome whilst practising. The voice should be trained to execute passages with equal precision in common or remote keys, and on this account I have written the exercises contained in my Vocal School, in chromatic order, by which plan, the same combinations are repeated in all keys, and the throat learns to form semitones and other intervals throughout its different stages of contraction.

*Anticipation*, or taking every note with a precursory interval, usually a third below, is a great blemish to singing, and is peculiarly irritating and distasteful to all good musicians, for the intervals thus sung are often entirely foreign to the chord employed by a composer, and therefore utterly destroy pure harmony or counterpoint. This defect often arises from uncertainty of intonation, and must be studiously avoided. *Reaching up* to high tones should also be prohibited; this habit is a sign of weakness and indecision, and must not be confounded with *Portamento*, the graceful performance of which implies complete command over the voice, and will be described among other means of expression in a later part of this work. High notes, almost without exception, should be taken decidedly and boldly—they mostly are employed to

\* The most extraordinary example of steady intonation occurred within my hearing during the rehearsal of a new opera, at the Scala Theatre, in Milan, Clara Novello being prima donna. A finale, consisting of a double quartet and chorus, was to be performed without orchestral accompaniment; it commenced—gradually the chorus sank, and the soli voices began to be dragged down also, with the exception of the principal treble, which continued its course at unaltered pitch. The effect on the ear became excruciating as the large body of voices and the predominant soprano part progressed simultaneously at the distance of half a tone. The first violin, himself partly misled, and fancying the prima donna might be getting sharp, sounded her note upon his instrument, but found, to his delight, that it was in perfect unison. A murmur of applause ran through the orchestra at this wonderful proof of independent intonation. The piece was rehearsed again and again, but was ultimately changed into a quintet, it being found impossible to keep the chorus steadily up to proper pitch.

† The singing of recitative is too much neglected in the modern school of music. Such singers as Malibran, Pasta, Duprez, Lablache, and others, produced some of their most thrilling dra-

matic effects by recitative; indeed, very few bars of this musical declamation will enable cultivated listeners to recognise at once a true and able artiste. It is deplorable to witness how, in the present day, recitatives are either entirely omitted, or executed with negligent indifference, as something unimportant in vocal art.

express energy or passion, and lose their appropriate effect if taken in the wavering and unsatisfactory manner known as "*reaching up*,"—which unfortunately is occasionally only "*reaching NEARLY up*."

Singing *flat*, which appears to be more prevalent than its opposite, is caused by weakness of the general vocal organs, and of the lips of the glottis; or it is sometimes attributable to inactivity or stiffness of the vocal ligaments. In the first case, a voice becomes flat in its tones, as fatigue increases;—in the second case, a singer will *commence* by singing flat, and gradually attain proper intonation as the muscles gain elasticity by action.

Singing *sharp* is often the concomitant of thin, wiry voices; it is, like singing *flat*, caused by weakness, and undue contraction of the vocal muscles, which, after overstrained effort or fatigue, become disobedient to a singer's controul.

Both the above-named defects of intonation are intolerable, but, unfortunately, not easy to combat by written laws or antidotes, being only partly occasioned by physical and ascertained deficiencies; they originate greatly from an absence of "musical ear," which is one of the unfathomable mysteries that constantly baffle an enquiring mind. This innate perception, or "good ear for music," when united to docile muscular agents, is the only real guarantee for correct intonation, and should be cultivated and assured by the habit of singing, without accompaniment, concerted or single pieces, and constant practice of reading at sight: the natural faculty will thus attain the accuracy and self-reliance necessary to its full development.

As regards general and practical rules for correct intonation, but one exists, which is—"Always sing in tune."

(To be concluded in our next.)

#### TO CORRESPONDENTS.

Our Subscribers are informed that they can now be supplied with copies of the Musical Times for February. We regret that the large increase of circulation should not have been met with sufficient promptness, and that many of our friends should consequently have been disappointed in obtaining copies.

C. J. F.—The mistake in the Alto part of "*Green Leaves*" can at once be corrected by referring to the Accompaniment. The *re* for the Alto voice in the last bar but three should be *sol*.

We cannot undertake to return offered contributions; the authors, therefore, will do well to retain copies.

The late hour at which Advertisements reach us, interferes much with their proper classification.

Colored Envelopes are sent to all Subscribers whose payment in advance is exhausted. The paper will be discontinued where the Subscriber neglects to renew. We again remind those who are disappointed in getting back numbers, that only the music pages are stereotyped, and of the rest of the paper, only sufficient are printed to supply the current sale.

Notices of concerts and other information supplied by our friends in the country, must be forwarded as early as possible after the occurrence, otherwise they cannot be inserted. It frequently occurs, that letters and papers respecting concerts which have taken place early in the month, do not reach us till the day of publication.

All communications must be authenticated by the proper name and address of the writer, not necessarily for publication.

We would request those who send us country newspapers, wishing us to read particular paragraphs, to mark the passage, by cutting a slip in the paper near it.

Musical Contributions.—We take this opportunity of thanking many of our friends for their kindness in offering us musical compositions for publication, but it is right to state that it would be quite inconsistent with our arrangements to entertain any offer of this nature.

#### Brief Chronicle of the last Month.

BEAUFORT.—A concert was given in the School-room, on the 31st of January, in aid of the funds of the British Schools. Among the performers were Mrs. Sage, Miss Lewis, Miss H. Roberts, and Miss Morgan; and Herr Pfeiffer on the violin. Mr. G. Sage was the conductor.

BELGRAVE (Leicestershire).—An excellent Church Choir has been organised here, on the voluntary system, under the superintendence of the vicar and churchwardens. The services of Mr. Stewart, of Leicester, have been secured to train the voices, and under him the choir cannot fail to be thoroughly grounded in the knowledge of church music. Mr. Pawley, schoolmaster, has been appointed choir-master, and, if we may judge from the quality of the voices, the regularity and punctuality evinced at the practice-meetings since its formation, and the interest and delight all feel in the undertaking, there is every reason to hope the efforts will be crowned with complete success. The last hour is devoted to secular music. A reading-room has also been opened in connection with the Church Choir, which answers admirably.

BRADFORD.—The Choir of College Chapel, with the assistance of a few friends, gave a public rehearsal, in their School-room, on the 15th ult., to a select audience. The first part consisted of part-songs, madrigals, &c.,—the second being a selection from Handel's *Messiah*,—the whole of which were rendered with ability. The audience seemed highly pleased with the evening's entertainment. Mr. Jesse Northend presided at the harmonium. Mr. Whitaker, the leader of the choir, conducted on the occasion.

CAMBERWELL.—A concert was given at Camberwell Hall on the 4th of February, by Herr Pauer,—which, owing to the unpropitious state of the weather, was but thinly attended. The principal singers were Miss Gerard and Mdlle. Beyrens. The former, who is a pupil of Sig. Garcia, has a voice of great power and compass. Her singing is highly finished, and she is likely to become a great favourite with the public. Mdlle. Beyrens sang with much taste. The rest of the concert consisted of instrumental music, which was well performed, Herr Pauer himself displaying considerable talent as a pianist.

CECILIAN SOCIETY.—*Alexander's Feast* was performed on the 28th of January, when the solo vocalists were Miss Fordham, Mr. J. W. Morgan, and Mr. Beardwell. Organist, Mr. Baines; conductor, Mr. Boardman. Mendelssohn's *St. Paul* will be the next performance.

CHERTSEY.—A free concert for "the people" was given by the Choral Association, on the 16th ult., conducted by Mr. Samuel Gee, organist and choir-master of the Parish Church. The music was most efficiently rendered. This association musters between fifty and sixty voices already, and is greatly prospering.

CHESTER-LE-STREET.—The Church Choir gave their annual concert, in the large National School room, on the 17th ult. The leading families of the town and neighbourhood attended, and the audience was very large. The concert consisted of secular pieces, which were exceedingly well received. The school children performed several glees very correctly. Mr. Hall presided at the pianoforte, and Mr. George Scott conducted.

CLIFTON.—The Vocal Association sang several choral part-songs, by Henry H. Smart and Macfarren, at a concert in the Victoria Rooms, on the 8th of last month. The principal performers on the occasion were Madame Viardot Garcia, Signori Luchesi and Dragone, Miss Arabella Goddard, Signor Regondi, &c. The choral portions of the entertainment were given in a manner that would have reflected credit on the metropolitan societies.

CROSBY HALL, BISHOPSGATE STREET.—On the 17th of February, an organ performance was given by Mr. T. C. Reynolds, with illustrative remarks by the Rev. J. W.